



## Monitoring report

*Elements of propaganda, disinformation and informational war in the domestic mass media*

*November 1, 2015 – January 31, 2016*

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## **I. OVERVIEW**

Within November 1, 2015 – January 31, 2016, the Independent Journalism Center monitored 12 media institutions – news portals, online versions of weekly publications and TV stations to identify whether the media products offered by these editorial teams contain elements of information manipulation. To this end, the way of presenting the major events in the political, economic, foreign, etc. areas by the Moldovan medias was analyzed. In addition, the analysis checked whether the media institutions follow the journalism rules concerning the verification of information from several sources, the pluralism of opinions and the maintenance of a balance in case of conflict news. The reference to the [Journalist's Ethical Code](#) and to the relevant scientific works has enabled the identification of the procedures and techniques applied by the Moldovan media to influence the public by disseminating manipulative messages.

### **Goal of the monitoring:**

To establish whether the media use manipulative methods when addressing subjects of high political, social or economic importance and to identify them; to reveal the errors committed, deliberately or unintentionally, by journalists when presenting the facts so that the case studies and the monitoring reports have an instructive mission. Another goal of the monitoring is to contribute to increasing the press consumers' vigilance in relation to the risks of getting informed from uncertain sources. Thus, the monitoring will help the consumers understand how the press can manipulate, distinguish between manipulative journalistic products and unbiased materials and encourage them to consult more sources of information when they have doubts regarding the credibility of some information.

### **Criteria for selecting the monitored press institutions:**

- Coverage area – national
- Language – Romanian and Russian
- Impact – circulation and audience

Print press: Ziarul National, Panorama (online versions of these publications);

Audiovisual: Publika TV, Prime TV, Jurnal TV, Accent TV, RTR Vesti, Ren TV;

Online press: Gagauzinfo.md, Novostipmr.com, Sputnik.md, Deschide.md

### **Methodology:**

The political and economic events of major public importance that occurred in the monitoring period were selected and how these events were addressed by the media was analyzed based on the Journalist's Ethical Code and the information manipulation techniques. In addition, the articles on topical issues, such as the relations between Chisinau and Tiraspol or the events from Ukraine were analyzed. The language and images used by the journalists, the method of selecting

the events for reflections, the accuracy of quoting the sources, the tonality of representations, etc. were analyzed from the perspective of the following notions:

- **propaganda**<sup>1</sup> - regular promotion of a [doctrine](#), [ideology](#), [idea](#), concept, opinion, etc. with a view to determine the public to adopt a new way of thinking. The propaganda is not a singular act, but a repeated and lasting one and is aimed at obtaining emotional support.
- **disinformation**, as explained by the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language<sup>2</sup> - piece of deliberately wrong information that is misleading – but also as defined by Vladimir Volkoff in the “Tractate on disinformation”<sup>3</sup>: technique that allows providing erroneous general information to third parties determining them to commit collective acts or to make judgments expected by the disinformers; manipulation of the public opinion, not of individuals, for political, economic, military and social goals without using classic advertising techniques. Disinformation aims at a [manipulating](#) the audience at national level either by discrediting information that contradicts each other or by supporting false conclusions.
- **Information war**<sup>4</sup> or media war – actions conducted during a crisis or war that are targeted against the enemy’s information or information systems to reach specific goals or influence specific adverse targets.

**The key monitored subjects within November 1, 2015 – January 31, 2016 are:**

- Visit of the Chairman of the Parliament to Brussels (November 2015),
- Decision of the Audiovisual Coordinating Council (ACC) to sanction the broadcasters that did not present declarations on their owners (November 2015),
- Relations between Chisinau and Tiraspol (November – December 2015),
- Military intervention of Russia in Syria (November 2015),
- Nomination of Ion Sturza as candidate for the position of Prime minister (December 2015),
- Events from Ukraine (December 2015),
- Nomination of Vlad Plahotniuc as candidate for the position of Prime minister by the Parliamentary majority (January 2016),
- Voting and inauguration of the Government led by Pavel Filip (January 2016),

## **II. GENERAL TRENDS**

The monitoring showed the presence of information manipulation practices and unbalanced presentation of subjects of public interest. The manipulation occurred through:

**Denial or concealment of facts** – there were cases when the media institutions operated in a selective manner and did not present all the relevant details of a fact, thus creating a favorable image to specific entities. Consequently, the public received fragmented information, which does not fully reflect the reality. This technique was used, for example, by [RTR Moldova](#) and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/propaganda>

<sup>2</sup> <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/dezinforma>

<sup>3</sup> <https://scorilos.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/vladimir-volkoff-tratat-de-dezinformare1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem

[Sputnik.md](#) when the visit of the Chairman of the Parliament to Brussels was addressed or [Prime](#) when presenting background information on Vlad Plahotniuc, proposed by the MPs for the position of prime minister.

**Camouflage** – excessive presentation of some details of a fact to distract the attention from the essence of the event or from other truly relevant information (method used by [Sputnik.md](#)).

**Exacerbation of facts** – unjustified highlighting of some facts, artificial intensification of their scope and exaggeration of feelings with a view to promote specific messages or discredit specific individuals or groups. These methods were applied by [Publika TV](#) (especially, when addressing the demonstration in support of the nomination of Vlad Plahotniuc for the position of Prime minister).

**Interpreting/commenting on the facts** – violation of the Ethical Code by which the journalists imposes their own view in the informative articles (this method is most often used by [Sputnik.md](#), [RTR](#)).

**Inexact quoting** and interpretation of the message of what is said – a technique whereby the sources are quoted selectively and receive different nuances depending on the journalist's formulations so that the final message corresponds to the interests of the one who transmits it. An example is how [Publika TV](#) quoted the statement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia regarding the events of January 20 in the Republic of Moldova.

**Labeling** – use of nicknames or pejorative or other epithets with a view to diminish somebody's authority or discredit it. Jurnal TV most frequently used the labeling method in relation to the candidate for the position of Prime Minister Vlad Plahotniuc, and by [Prime TV](#) and [Publika TV](#) in relation to the businessman Viorel Topa, owner of Jurnal TV.

**Titles/images**, video and audio effects – some press institutions selected the photo and video images so as to present individuals or groups from a negative perspective, or used images that had only partial connection with the subject of the article, but helped highlight the idea fostered in the text and thus amplified the negative message they wanted to convey to the public ([Sputnik.md](#), [Prime](#)).

## II. DATA ANALYSIS

### Subject 1. Visit of the Chairman of the Parliament to Brussels (November 2015)

On November 16-17, 2015, Andrian Candu made his first official visit to [Brussels](#) as the Chairman of the Moldovan Parliament. Unlike the other visits of Moldovan officials to Members of the European Parliament (MEP), this visit was special, because it was for the first time that the MEPs asked Andrian Candu inconvenient, direct and specific questions, including about the fight against oligarchy in our country. Some of the monitored media institutions presented this fact with nuances and small interpretations while other media institutions diminished its importance

and used the camouflage method placing the focus on peripheral information with a view to distract the attention from the essence of things.

[Jurnal TV](#) said: “Candu, driven into a corner by the Europeans”; [Ziarul National](#)– “Embarrassing// Candu, asked in the European Parliament how he intends to fight against the “oligarch Plahotniuc”, who is his groomsman”; the newspaper “[Panorama](#)” – “The members of the European Parliament expressed their disappointment about the situation in Moldova”. The TV station [RTR Moldova](#) inserted a subject with a challenging title – “Candu was reprimanded in the European Parliament (video)”, but avoided the question of the MEP Cristian Preda about the “oligarch Plahotniuc, founder of the Democratic Party”. Thus, the TV station used a disinformation method – denial or concealment of facts. [Sputnik.md](#) entitled the news: “Candu in Brussels: if we don’t change the system, we will have no results” and quoted massively from the speaker’s statements, but gave fewer and selective quotes of the MEPs who asked sharp questions, which were left unanswered although they present an interest for the whole society. At least five MEPs asked questions (Petras Auštrevičius, Andi Cristea, Gabriele Zimmer, Cristian Preda, Andrej Plenković, Mark Demesmaeker). It was obvious how one source of information was highlighted and other relevant sources were neglected, which results in the presentation of an erroneous reality<sup>5</sup>.

## **Subject 2. Decision of the ACC to sanction the broadcasters that did not present statements on their owners (November 2015)**

In November 2015, in line with the amendments made to the Audiovisual Code, the broadcasters, for the first time in the Republic of Moldova, were to present to the ACC statements on ensuring the ownership transparency. On November 17, 2015, the ACC had a public meeting where it declared that a number of broadcasters did not obey the legislation and sanctioned them through public warning. The event is relevant, because the public opinion were to learn who the end beneficiaries of the radio and TV stations were.

[Publika TV](#) and [Prime TV](#) broadcast, with small adaptations, the same piece of news about the above mentioned event entitling it “Nine TV stations and three radio stations sanctioned by the ACC”. Out of the 12 sanctioned broadcasters, Prime TV focused largely on the TV station “Vocea Basarabiei”, making reference to the previous statements of the former MP Valeriu Saharneanu and former founder of this station who declared that “Vocea Basarabiei” was abusively taken by Vlad Filat. The text was accompanied by images where Vlad Filat is surrounded by masked officers from the National Anticorruption Center. Prime TV violated the standard of equity<sup>6</sup> and compulsoriness of consulting the second source when individuals or institutions are presented in a negative context, but also the balance of the journalistic material when it did not give as many details about the owners of the other TV stations mentioned in the news. The authors also said that, according to the statement made by the General Media Grup

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<sup>5</sup> Case study 1 <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316456>

<sup>6</sup> [http://consiliuldepres.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod\\_d\\_rom.pdf](http://consiliuldepres.md/fileadmin/fisiere/documente/cod_d_rom.pdf)

SRL, which comprises four TV stations – Prime, Publika, Canal 2 and Canal 3 – their owner is the “businessman Vlad Plahotniuc” and the images showed the scanned declaration signed by the owner. This information and the image, which, in the piece of news, is in contrast with what was said earlier about “Vocea Basarabiei”, suggests, by showing the document and signature on the whole screen that there is transparency in this case, while the other case is only about conflict, scandal and abuse. As for two other stations, the formulation is a manipulation through language – “the stations TV 7 and TNT are fully controlled by the LDPM MP Chiril Lucinschi”. As in the case when the General Media Grup SRL was mentioned, the appropriate formulation here would be “belong to” or “the owner is”, because the notion of “control” has a negative meaning when it is associated with media institutions. Thus, the public did not receive information, but a manipulative one that was commented through both the text and images and the facts of which were filtered and presented in an unbalanced way<sup>7</sup>.

### **Subject 3. Relations between Chisinau and Tiraspol (November - December 2015)**

The relations between different structures of the Republic of Moldova and of the Transnistrian region are constantly addressed in the Tiraspol press, and one of the monitored media institutions – [Novostipmr.ru](http://Novostipmr.ru) – dedicated significant space for this subject in November and December 2015. Most often, the presented information was subjective, fragmented or false. For example, the news “[The head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: pressure is put on Transnistria to create uncertainty among its inhabitants in their own choices](#)”, that was published on November 19, is a reaction to the issue of the joint Moldovan-Ukrainian customs check at the Transnistria border. The author accused the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine without including their position on the issue of the joint customs check. The same happened in the case of the news of November 23 entitled “[The representatives of Transnistria call Moldova and Ukraine again not to block the shipment of goods from the station “Slobodka-Export”](#)”, which referred to the meeting of the expert groups on the issue of railway transportation in Tighina, in the OSCE office. The information was provided from a single source, which contravenes to the Journalist’s Ethical Code and the readers were imposed to read the point of view of the Tiraspol officials.

Similarly, the authors used another manipulation technique in the news “[The Moldovan Central Election Committee hinders the elections in Transnistria](#)”, published on November 22: they selected the sources of information that served their purpose to transmit and support the idea that needs to be imposed to the public. The news was a reaction to the report of the chairman of the Moldovan Central Election Committee (CEC), Iurie Ciocan, presented by him in the Parliament. The authors quoted Iurie Ciocan and the socialist MP Grigori Novac, who criticized the CEC for the fact that very few voting sections were opened in Russia for the 2014 Parliamentary elections as compared to other countries<sup>8</sup>. In fact, in December last year, this portal continued publishing

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<sup>7</sup> Case study 1 <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316456>

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem

news from a single source: out of the about 15 pieces of news on political subjects with regard to Moldova, only two made an exception and requested the second source<sup>9</sup>.

#### **Subject 4. Military intervention of Russia in Syria (November 2015)**

In November 2015, the Russian TV stations that are broadcast in Moldova permanently showed reports on the actions of the Russian air forces in Syria. Although, apparently, the goal was to inform as transparently as possible the public about the military operation against the Islamists, people learned how destructive and effective the strikes of the Russian army are; how modern the Russian weapons are; how much the global opinion welcomes the actions of Russians in Syria; how many facilities of the Islamists are destroyed by the precision of the Russian bombs and missiles, etc. – information and statements the truthfulness of which nobody will be able to check, which is an indicator of propaganda. To give some examples, here are some titles on the webpage of the Russian TV station [Ren TV](#): [“Russian military planes dropped bombs able to destroy the concrete reinforcements on the facilities of the “Islamic State”](#); [“In two days, the Russian planes hit 263 facilities of the ISIL in Syria”](#); [“Over 600 ISIL fighters destroyed by cruise missiles in Syria”](#); [“The air forces of the Russian Federation hit 472 ISIL facilities in Syria”](#); [“The air forces of the Russian Federation destroyed over one thousand tank trucks with fuel that belonged to the ISIL in Syria”](#).

The same TV stations broadcast several pieces of news the message of which is that the anti-Islamic alliance run by the USA is inefficient in Syria and that the NATO plays a double game: [“Klintevici: SU-24 was shot down upon the instructions of NATO because of the success of the Russian military forces in Syria”](#). In other words, the Ren TV news was about the greatness of Russia and the lowness of the West, especially, of the United States. In addition, the incident with the Russian plane shot down by the Turkish military forces at the border with Syria served as grounds for producing subjects that generate emotions and foster a so-called patriotism ([“In Moscow, parents called their newly born daughter Syria”](#) or [“The teacher about the sailor who died in Syria: he died for Russia”](#)), but does not inform and does not address the events in a balanced and objective way, which shows again the presence of elements typical of the information war and of the propaganda. For instance, no reports on the costs of the military operations in Syria correlated with the economic condition of some communities were made, which was noticed by several analysts from Russia<sup>10</sup>.

#### **Subject 5. Nomination of Ion Sturza for the position of Prime minister (December 2015)**

The president of the country nominated Ion Sturza as candidate for the position of Prime minister in the evening of December 21. On the same day, in the morning, the prime deputy-president of the DPM, Vladimir Plahotniuc announced his return in the politics and 14 of the 21 communist MPs left the parliamentary group of the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova. The

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<sup>9</sup> [Case study 2](#) <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316478>

<sup>10</sup> [Case study 1](#) <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316456>

nomination of Ion Sturza was massively addressed in the news bulletins of Publika TV, but people did not receive full and unbiased information, but rather a number of materials that transmitted the idea that the nomination was a negative fact and a “mistake” of the president.

After the [news](#) with the President’s announcement and the candidate’s statements, “[Ion Sturza is nominated as candidate for the position of Prime minister](#)”, Publika TV broadcast background and opinion news, mainly with negative information. The journalists of this station produced the “integrity profile” of the candidate and published it with the title: “[DETAILS on the activity of Ion Sturza. The former Prime minister involved in corruption and relations with the Russian KGB](#)”. According to the news, Ion Sturza was the Prime minister 16 years ago; after eight months of mandate he was removed by the Parliament; recently, “the former communist MP Alexandr Petcov reminded in an interview that Sturza was accused of corruption by the IMF representatives while he was the Prime minister”. In addition, it was mentioned that the “press from Romania where Sturza has several businesses wrote that he worked in KGB-controlled structures in the Soviet period and made an impressive fortune due to the relations he established in the former USSR”. Contrary to the ethical rules, all the negative information (involvement in corruption, relations with the KGB) was not proven with solid evidence and only reference to press materials was made. The journalists did not show accuracy and impartiality when they created this profile and the words “Soviet period”, “former USSR”, “KGB-controlled structures” were aimed at consolidating the expected information outcome – to raise repulsion/indignation at the candidate and, indirectly, at the person who nominated him. The fact that the intention in this case was not to provide full, accurate and unbiased information to the public, but rather to manipulate it by forming an attitude of denial is also confirmed by other news broadcast on the day of the nomination, including the one entitled “[The political analysts about Ion Sturza as candidate for the position of Prime minister: this is a mistake of the president Timofti](#)” where, contrary to the standards regarding the pluralism of opinions stipulated by the Ethical Code and the Audiovisual Code (art. 7)<sup>11</sup>, three analysts who expressed the same opinion were quoted<sup>12</sup>.

On December 21, Publika TV broadcast a number of pieces of news produced in a selective manner and from a single source on this subject : “[A cheap political game](#)”. [Andrian Candu about the nomination of Ion Sturza and what underpinned it](#)”, “[Igor Dodon about the nomination of Ion Sturza: “We will not vote for a Gastarbeiter from across the Prut river](#)”, “[The US Ambassador wonders if there is anybody left who still thinks about the Moldovan people](#)”. The last news announcing that the “US Ambassador in Chisinau, James Pettit, wrote on [Facebook](#) that Nicolae Timofti does not think about the country’s problems”, has generated a reaction of the US Embassy that made a clarification on the second day: [The comment of the Ambassador Pettit](#) refers to the overall situation in Moldova. This comment is not a reaction to the nomination made by the President and, in fact, was posted yesterday at 3 pm, several hours before the announcement made by the President. We ask Publika TV to make a rectification so

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<sup>11</sup> [http://lex.justice.md/document\\_rom.php?id=041D82D8:3A07C731](http://lex.justice.md/document_rom.php?id=041D82D8:3A07C731)

<sup>12</sup> [Case study 2](#) <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316478>

that the viewers are not misled by inaccurate reports”<sup>13</sup>. Thus, Publika TV distorted the message of the US Ambassador and violated the Journalist’s Ethical Code in an attempt to use one of the efficient persuasion methods in manipulation: the argument “ad verecundiam” (appeal to authority)<sup>14</sup>.

### **Subject 6. Events from Ukraine (December 2015)**

In December, the subjects on Ukraine were massively presented in the main news bulletin “Vesti” on [RTR TV](#). The programs and subjects presented there are structured and produced in such a way that the viewer has the impression that everything is good in Vladimir Putin’s Russia, while in Ukraine led by Petro Porosenko, on the contrary, everything is extremely bad.

In the monitoring, the news [bulletin of December 17](#) was analyzed. It was the day when the Russian president held the traditional annual press conference. A number of elements were identified in this program that give the media product a propaganda effect instead of the informative one.

Half of the news bulletin – about 30 minutes – was dedicated to Putin’s press conference. The producers made a collage of questions and answers to highlight the addressed subjects, as well as moments aimed at emphasizing the features of the Russian leader. Beside the relevant answers of public interest, the producers of the collage included answers like: “If somebody in the governance of Turkey decided to lick the Americans in a place, I don’t know if they did the right thing” (the video with this answer was also included in the titles of the bulletin opening) or “Saakasvili is a spit in the face of the Ukrainian people”. These expressions that are rather insults than information and are familiar to the ordinary people were left in the broadcasting on purpose to generate sympathy to the person who delivered them. The collage also contained parts from questions with positive messages supporting the Russian leader: “You’re in good shape. We are extremely grateful to you for this as our children follow your example”.

The bulletin also included a block of opinions of the journalists who stayed in the hall after the press conference and praised Vladimir Putin’s input. They did it as a reaction to the request of the RTR reporter to comment on the fact that the president answered a number of “hot” questions. However, beside the violation of the ethical standard that stipulates that the journalist who presents other people’s views does not present their own views, there was also a manipulation technique called “shifting the focus” in this case. What is normal (being honest, not avoiding difficult questions) is presented like a merit.

The second part of the bulletin showed news about Ukraine that took one quarter of the total time (min. 46.35 - 61.00). The material about the fact that a Russian humanitarian convoy brought goods, including toys for children from Donbas city was followed by a report from the “People

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<sup>13</sup> [unimedia.info/stiri/permalink-106521.html](http://unimedia.info/stiri/permalink-106521.html)

<sup>14</sup> [Case study 2](#) <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316478>

Republic of Donetsk”, Debaltevo community, that did not mention at all that this “republic” is not recognized by any country and that it is part of Ukraine. The existence of this “state” was presented as a fact, which demonstrates bias, hence the violation of ethical rules. The journalist showed that the community “revives from ruins” after the destructions produced by the war and presented the moment when the leader of the “republic” offered the key of an apartment to a family. Through its text and images, the subject was built in such a way as to raise compassion for the people of Debaltevo and revolt against those who made this community a “Reichstag in fire”. The subject openly supports a separatist regime the “People Republic of Donetsk” and cannot be qualified as a media product, but as a propaganda one<sup>15</sup>.

In another subject, the journalists talked about the “instability” in Ukraine and said, without any reference to the source that Petro Porosenko “has already been warned by the nationalists from the *Pravii sektor* that he might not manage to get to the airport”. A parallel with the former runaway president Viktor Ianukovici who managed to leave the country was also made. In addition, the reporter says that the “threat of the third Maidan becomes quite real”. The block about Ukraine lasted about 15 minutes and nothing positive was said about it during this time. Moreover, being shown in the same bulletin, the information about Russia and about Ukraine presented two antagonist images to the viewers – Russia with a strong and even brash leader who is loved by the people and does not have any complexes in front of the journalists; and Ukraine, destroyed by the conflict in the East, threatened by a “new Maidan” and where the only good things that take place come from Russia (the humanitarian aid for the breakaway region).

#### **Subject 7. Nomination of Vlad Plahotniuc for the position of Prime minister (January 2016)**

This event was addressed in an unbalanced and subjective manner by some of the monitored media institutions. Methods like mixing the truth and lie, omissions, fragmented information, concealment of facts, selection of sources, etc. were used. The meeting held by the Democratic Party in the morning of January 13 to support the nomination of the businessman Vlad Plahotniuc for the position of Prime minister was presented by Publika TV [in the 7.00 news bulletin](#) as an action of self-mobilization of people who “*will come to remind everyone, including the president Nicolae Timofti about the decision of the Constitution Court by which the head of state is required to nominate for the position of Prime minister the person proposed by the majority of MPs*”.

On the website Publika.md this report was followed by a text entitled “[Demonstration with 70 thousand people in Chisinau. The people asked the nomination of the candidate for the position of Prime minister](#)”. This news presented contradictory information to the viewers – that people mobilized independently, but that there is an organizer, which confuses them and does not allow them to have a clear idea about what kind of event takes place and who organizes it. In addition, the report used a mix of truth and lie: it is true that a protest will take/takes place, but it is not

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<sup>15</sup> [Case study 2](#) <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316478>

true that it is a spontaneous mobilization of people as suggested. In addition, the exaggeration was used when the number of participants was announced, in combination with the technique of presented information that cannot be checked – the exact number of participants cannot be known by anyone.

[Sputnik.md](#) portal focused on building an image of lack of credibility and weakening of authority of the head of the country. On January 13, seven news were published on the portal, accrediting the idea that Nicolae Timofti should resign - information that, amid the protests in the capital, was meant to create confusion and panic, but also to discredit the authority, imposing the idea that the President basically has no legitimacy: [“Timofti may be about to resign”](#), [“The probability of resignation of Timofti increases from hour to hour”](#), [“Moldovan Parliament can start the procedure of dismissal of Timofti”](#). The news has no factual support, abounds in interpretations, uses statements without sources or cites obscure sources and unknown experts, who argue that *the President of Moldova is not free in making his decisions*. Meanwhile, the reaction of the Presidency was not asked. The news entitled “Moldovan Parliament can start the procedure of dismissal of Timofti” was accompanied by a photo from the parliamentary chamber, where MPs stand with raised hands and vote for something. The message that the dismissal of the President would be almost decided was thus transmitted. In this case the public was not informed in a balanced way, but was inspired and often repeated the idea that the President Timofti does not deserve to remain in office.

And background information about the candidate Plahotniuc was presented by the press by means of various techniques influencing the public. Those that are part of the media holding owned by Vlad Plahotniuc presented only positive information, using procedures such as *omission* and *selective presentation of facts*. At the other extreme is Jurnal TV, which sketched a much grimmer picture of this person, using the label “oligarch” and, in several cases, unproven information.

The channels Publika TV and Prime presented Vladimir Plahotniuc as a businessman who “began his political career five years ago, when he ran for MP as member of the Democratic Party”. Different activities and passions of the politician were reviewed, but no word was said about his business and wealth - although the information about the properties and business is vital for society when it comes to a person entering a public office, since it concerns his/her integrity and interests. The most important omitted information was that he owns several media outlets, including those that broadcasted the news: Publika TV, Prime. Instead, the public was communicated the idea of finding a “saviour” for the financial situation of the country: *“His public appearances were rare, especially, in crucial moments, of negotiation on establishing pro-European parliamentary majorities in the recent years”*<sup>16</sup>.

Jurnal TV dedicated to the background of Vlad Plahotniuc a subject lasting five minutes. As in other news, journalists of this channel did not mention his name without using the label “oligarch” for his. The portrait presented [in the news bulletin of 19.00](#) o'clock is much more complete than those of other channels and contains objective data that the public needs to know. However, the news has appreciations, judgments of value, exaggerations, information that cannot be proved, labels and confusing wordings as well, all meant to discredit the character that is a technique of manipulation. *“Oligarch with offshore business, character with double identities,*

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<sup>16</sup> Case study 3 <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316587>

*politician with interests, holder of media groups. He has family ties with the most powerful people in the state, was beneficiary of several raider attacks and is suspected of blackmail and threats ... Having extended levers through persons appointed by him on the justice system - is the beginning of the subject about Plahotniuc broadcasted by Jurnal TV on 13 January. Accusations and negative information should have been balanced with the reaction of the person concerned.*

In conclusion, from the news broadcasted on 13 January 2016 by channels controlled by the DPM and Vlad Plahotniuc, people could find halves of truths, a distorted reality and information interpreted in the interest of owners. Meanwhile, at Jurnal TV viewers saw another side of reality, much closer to the objective one, although it was presented with obvious elements of manipulation.

### **Subject 8. Voting and inauguration of the Government headed by Pavel Filip (January 2016)**

On 20 January the Cabinet of Pavel Filip, representative of the Democratic Party, was voted by the Parliament in a quite short time, without presenting the government program before MPs, which exempted the new Prime-Minister and his team from the round of questions that could come from MPs of the opposition. Amid discontents and protests in the capital, this fact and the candidate himself generated a large scale demonstration before the Parliament, in which three large groups of protesters participated – the Dignity and Truth Platform, the Party of Socialists and Our Party. All demanded annulment of the vote and early elections.

In the news from Publika TV, focus was made on how the protest is carried out, rather than on its causes, which is one of the circumstances that should not have been neglected by unbiased journalists.

From the news of Publika.md people learned that five ambulances arrived at the Parliament and that [witnesses say that they saw „wounded carabinieri”](#); that [during protests five policemen and eight protesters were slightly wounded](#), the source of information being the Interior Minister, Oleg Balan; that [a cameraman was beaten and robbed](#) by a representative of the DT Platform, whose reaction misses. The portal also informed that [Mihai Ghimpu was beaten by protesters](#) and that Dorin Chirtoaca appealed for calm. All news covering the protests ended with the paragraph *“Previously, violent demonstrators pulled out the back door of the building of the Parliament. Many of them started to beat policemen and took away their shields and helmets. The leader of the “Dignity and Truth” Platform, Andrei Nastase, tried to stop the demonstrators to continue their actions, but he did not succeed. Later, the protesters started shouting “Down Nastase!”* This information is not complete, since not only Andrei Nastase called for calm, but also the other two leaders of the groups of demonstrators. This **omission** and repeating of the statement “Down Nastase!” can be seen as an attempt to give the impression that Nastase, who lost control of the situation, is the sole responsible for violence.

Publika TV also informed about messages coming from exterior about the events in Chisinau, presenting them as supporting the Government of Filip. For example, the Foreign Minister of Latvia [wrote on Twitter](#): *“Alarming news about events in Moldova, all parties should refrain and be calm, the new government should quickly start real reforms”*. This message was presented in a story entitled [“The Government of Filip receives assurances of support from the Baltics. Statements of the Foreign Ministers”](#). The title suggests that the ministers of all the three Baltic countries have made official statements supporting the Government of Filip. In fact, we learn from the news, not from their official statements, but on social networks, that only two of

them commented on the subject and their messages contain neither the word “support”, nor the name of the new prime minister, but only wishes for power and determination, and expression of hope that the Government will start reforms.

Jurnal TV also informed throughout the day about all that happened in the Parliament and at the protest, it also plaid the role of tribune for demonstrators and their leaders, being rather a means of calling for rebellion. Here are some eloquent titles in this regard: “[The DT Platform announces mobilization](#)”; 13.42 h., “[16.00 o’clock, Protest at the Parliament](#)”, 14.59 h.; “[General Mobilization](#)”, 15.50 h.; “[Protest against inauguration of the Government of Filip](#)” 16.20 h.; “[Protest against political riot](#)” 17.07 h.<sup>17</sup>.

## CONCLUSIONS

Cases of use of techniques of informational manipulation were found mainly in coverage of internal events with major political content and subjects of foreign policy on situations of conflict. Through the broadcasted content, some monitored media supported and promoted the political line of their owners and presented a distorted picture of reality.

A part of monitored media outlets transmitted information from a single source, exaggerated facts, presented commented information, used labels, selected sources that broadcasted the same message, to the detriment of balanced information and pluralism of opinions, favoured by means of text and images some subjects of news and disfavoured the others. The most common deviations from ethical norms related to a balanced presentation of facts and objective coverage of reality were found in the case of Publika TV, RTR, REN TV, novostipmr.ru, sputnik.md.

Monitored media producing content in Russian presented events from Russia, Ukraine and Syria in a light favourable only to Russia (selection/building of issues, wording of text, combination of images, titles) without ensuring a full and fair information.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The media outlets should be guided in their activity solely by the norms of the Code of Conduct and quality standards in journalism in order to properly cover the reality and offer to the public an objective, unbiased and clear information. Subjects should be selected depending on the public interest, rather than on criteria such as political or other interests of owners of press trusts.

Journalists should give up practices of unilateral presentation of facts, exaggeration or commenting of information, if they are not included in programs or categories of opinions.

Reactions that take and retransmit foreign news should verify the information, especially conflict information, from as many credible international sources as possible, so as to avoid misleading information of consumers. The ACC, as guarantor of the public interest and regulator in the field of broadcasting, should monitor how foreign channels retransmitted in the Republic of Moldova comply with the internal and European broadcasting legislation on correct, objective and pluralistic information, and to take actions, if necessary.

Consumers of press are advised to get information from several media sources to avoid the risk of receiving incorrect and manipulating information.

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<sup>17</sup> [Case study 3](#) <http://media-azi.md/ro/node/316587>

